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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: INDONESIAN BAHAI FACE DIFFICULTIES

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Recent proselytizing activities have created difficulties for a small Baha'i community in East Java. The local Council of Muslim Clerics decided not to ban the Baha'i because they are a distinct religion. While Baha'i regularly encounter administrative difficulties due to their religion, there have been no reported incidents of violence. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Recently, in a small village of 2,650 families in the Tulungagung Regency of East Java, the local Baha'i community drew the attention of the majority Muslim population through their door-to-door proselytizing activities. This small community of nine families are all converts from Islam. The rest of the community, who are all Muslim, mistakenly viewed the Baha'i religion as a deviant sect of Islam and requested the local Council of Muslim Clerics (MUI) to ban Baha'i activities. The local police asked the MUI to temporarily ban all Baha'i activities for fear that they would cause social disorder.

¶3. (SBU) Abu Sofyan Firajudin, a secretary of the MUI in Tulungagung, said that the MUI decided not to ban the Baha'i religion since it is a distinct religion and not a heresy of Islam. However, this view is not shared by all local MUI throughout the country. Soesiana T. Ekawati, a coordinator of the Baha'i community in Indonesia, said that in June 2009 the MUI in Palopo of South Sulawesi issued a religious ruling declaring the Baha'i religion a heretical religion. She said that this illustrates widespread confusion throughout Indonesia about the nature of the Baha'i religion.

¶4. (SBU) Soesiana also said that, in general, Baha'i in Indonesia encounter administrative obstacles when they deal with the government. For example, it is often difficult to obtain ID cards or marriage certificates from the local village office or to complete school entrance forms because of the "religious identification" question. A Surabaya based newspaper Surya reported that the secretary of Ringinpitu village rejected Baha'i followers' request to mention "Baha'i" in religion column of ID cards. Soesi stated that she kept the "religion" column blank when she applied for an ID card, and considered it a victory that she didn't have to claim another religion just to complete the bureaucratic process.

¶5. (SBU) Fortunately, there have been no reported instances of physical violence against Baha'i in Indonesia. Soesiana said that so far there has also not been any physical intimidation from Muslim hardliner groups like the Islam Defender Front (FPI). Abu Sofyan said that although people were not happy with the presence of Baha'i in their community, they did not express their disappointment through violence. Instead they expressed their concerns through the proper channel - MUI.

